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PSYCHOLOGICAL ABNORMALITIES IN AUGUST STRINDBERG

In his famous preface¹ to "Miss Julia," Strindberg has remonstrated against the customary practice in literature of constructing only simple automatic characters. Human nature is too deep, and possesses too plastic a mobility, and too great a complexity of structure to be disposed of in a sweeping manner. Of this complexity and unfathomableness of the human nature, he himself is the best example. The number of pronounced, and, as it will seem, strangely antagonistic elements of his personality, is the first thing noticed by him who attempts to interpret the character of August Strindberg.

What a soul-complex is his; the full natural force, and the fear, and the unbridled imagination of early man, proud and irresistible in its unsubdued, primitive strength; the love of perfected, ideal beauty of classical Greece; the voluptuous, sensualistic love of art and life, characteristic of the Renaissance; the ethical sternness of the Reformation; the keen intellect of the twentieth century scientist: his intensely sensitive perceptions, his sceptical attitude, ever ready to criticize, dissect and analyze all things, from the chemical solution in his retort to the vaguest moods of the longing soul; the *credo quia absurdum*-atmosphere of the Middle Ages, where mischievous goblins in the dusk perform their hocus pocus with duped mortals, and witches prepare their mysterious potations in the church yards by night,—all the different strata of human civilization seem to have made their deposits to form the phenomenon called August Strindberg. But the process was not of that quiet, unpassionate nature which we find represented in the mind of a scientist, nor like the gentle geologic formations of a plain, but rather the wild strata-formations of a volcanic region, fantastic at times, grandiose often, interesting always, a region where impetuous forces are ever at war with one another. It is on these chaotic depths of *strength* and *weakness*, of refined genius and strange *abnormality* that the modern psychologist has ample opportunity to exercise his analytic acuteness.

¹ Fröken Julie, *Samlade skrifter av August Strindberg*, v. XXII, p. 102 ff.

I

STRINDBERG'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT AND NEUROTIC DISPOSITION

No matter how vacillating, how incomprehensibly complex Strindberg's personality may be, there are a few traits that ever remain unchanged throughout life: his quenchless thirst for knowledge, his incorruptible honesty, unconditional truthfulness, child-like open heartedness, and above all, his extreme sensitiveness,—the vividness by which he experiences, the primitive force by which he responds to stimuli, "a life trembling as an uncovered nerve"; and as a result of these, a strongly developed tendency to self-revelation and self-torture.

Every literary work must of necessity be more or less colored by the particular life-experience of its author, but this is especially true in our day of extreme individualism, when each little literary *Ichheit*, every diminutive ego, clamors for attention to his own private home-affairs, and every youth imagines that each emotional ripple of his, each chaste love-dream in life's May-time belongs to the "Eternal Values" without the knowledge of which the world would suffer irreparable loss. At the same time there lies deep in our common human nature an impulse of self-revelation. No wonder, then, that those great spontaneous beings called poetic geniuses, who see clearer, think deeper, and, above all, feel stronger and consequently suffer more than ordinary men, should feel an invincible impulse to give artistic expression to the varied events of their life. "All I have published is but fragments of a long confession," Goethe wrote. But no great author, unless it be Rousseau, is so thoroughly subjective as August Strindberg. Practically all that he has written may, in the fullest sense, be said to be bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. His entire productions ought, therefore, to be consulted in a study of this kind, but his autobiographical works, of which there is a considerable number, ought to receive first consideration. In these autobiographical works collected and issued under the title, "The Bondwoman's Son"¹—perhaps the most remarkable volumes of their kind in

¹ The series contain the following parts:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. Tjänstekvinnans son, | 3. I röda rummet, | 6. Legender, |
| 2. Jäsningsstiden, | 4. Författaren, | 7. Ensam. |
| | 5. Inferno, | |

Under this group ought also to be considered, "En dåres försvarstal," and "Fagervik och skamsund."

the world's literature, he has recounted his varied life-experiences, and submitted his interpretation of them.

What is it that makes these quite innocent looking volumes so unique: youth's common struggle with scepticism and warm blood, thwarted plans, old age and conservatism? It is more than that: it is a great human life-history,—the life-history we might almost say of a whole period with its hopes and sorrows, burning hot, that throb on these pages; a self-consuming genius, who is continually born anew. His was the story of Prometheus and the vulture over again, and the vulture was his own restless thoughts. His was a life so full of intense suffering, of intellectual self-torture that ordinary callous mortals find it quite impossible to comprehend; it was the violent reaction of a hypersensitive mind to the manifold stimuli of an unsympathetic world.

But the question will naturally be raised how far, after all, may we take this revelation to be a reliable vivisection of his inner mental state? How far has a retrospective falsification of memory played its part in giving us a distorted picture of his real condition? Being a poet, and having a poet's vivid fancy, might he not have idealized or intensified his story? As a dramatist of the first order, might he not have incarnated himself, so to speak, into different personalities without really being aware of it? To questions like these it is difficult to give a positive answer. Instances are not lacking that point to a remoulding artistic touch or a presentation of facts that will give force to his view-point at the time of writing, unconscious though it may be.² But herein friends and foes agree that if ever poet uncovered his soul to the profane world, laid bare his most intimate experiences with, at times, almost brutal severity, that poet is he. The following stanza, as a critic has pointed out, could serve as a motto to most of his works:

There hangs in the book-store window
A thin-clad little book.
It is a torn heart, bleeding
Which dangles on its hook.³

² Cf. his introduction to the 2-6 editions of *Tjänstekvinnans son*. *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 460; *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, p. 205.

³ *Sömngångarnätter på vakna dagar*, *Sam. skr.* v. XIII, p. 210.

Där hänger i boklädsfönstret
en tunnklädd liten bok.
Det är ett urtaget hjärta
som dlinglar där på sin krok.

In the first chapter of the "Bondwoman's Son," which is perhaps, if not the best that he has written, at any rate the most characteristic, full of the keenest psychological observations presented to us with graphical lucidity, it is the child whom he portrays, and that child is the coming August Strindberg in miniature. First, we catch a glimpse of his parents. His father,⁴ strict, stern, a decided aristocrat who has learned to receive life's hard knocks with quiet resignation, does not seem to have, though mentally gifted, much in common with his son. But there is a much stronger resemblance, we are told,⁵ between the poet and his grandfather, a passionate man with living, artistic interests. We have three dramatic sketches from his hand in print. That Strindberg however should owe the peculiarities of his artistic temperament to a very uncertain tinge of Finnish blood, as Marholm Hansson⁶ would have us believe, is mere nonsense. His mother,⁷ and this should be noted more than has hitherto been the case, was of a highly nervous, hysteric temperament, easily irritated, a woman of the frail and religiously devotional type. That congenital influences of a pathological nature were not absent in the family is shown by the fact that his oldest brother suffered from hysteria.⁸

Strindberg has himself repeatedly called attention to his premature birth, and the possible influence of the stormy family-affairs on his constitutional development previous to this event.⁹ However this may be, we know that already as a child he shows something of the abnormality that has often been attributed to genius.

"His first sensations, as he afterward recollected them, were fear and hunger. He was afraid of the dark, afraid of getting thrashed, afraid of irritating everybody, afraid of falling, of stumbling, of being in the way. He was afraid of his brother's fists, the maidservant's hair pullings, grandmother's snubs, mother's switch, and father's rod."¹⁰

⁴ *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, p. 9 ff., 68.

⁵ Eswein: *August Strindberg*.

⁶ *Vi Kvinder og vore Diktere*, pp. 126-163.

⁷ *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, p. 10 ff., 88.

⁸ *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9; *En dâres försvarstal*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVI, p. 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

"His early training," he says, "no one had time to attend to, and the school took a hand in the matter where the maid-servant left off. The family was really an institution for feeding, and a washing and ironing establishment."¹¹

"He was brought up on snubs and hair pullings, 'God who loves thee,' and lessons of obedience. Life received the child with duties, only duties, no rights. The wishes of all the other persons must be granted, but the child's alone suppressed. He could not take hold of a thing without doing something wrong, he could not go anywhere without being in the way, he could not say a word without disturbing someone. At last he did not dare to move. His highest duty and his highest virtue was: to sit still in a chair and be quiet."¹²

These, perhaps, many of us partly recognize as familiar, but few indeed have August Strindberg's extreme sensitiveness. It is as "if my soul were exposed raw,"¹³ he writes in "Alone." No figure of speech could better express the nature of his temperament. Everything with which he comes in contact burns him. In this extreme sensitiveness, I contend, we find the secret of the unparalleled productivity, but it is also the soil from which have sprung the unfortunate pathological weeds of later tragic hours. If his early nourishment had been healthier,¹⁴ if the countenances of those about him had been brighter, their attitude toward him more tenderly loving; had the fortune of the home been more prosperous his life's story would have read differently, the bearing of his works would have been calmer. But this was not to be.

The once prosperous home had met with serious reverses. With seven children and two servants, the family had now to be contented with only three rooms. "The furniture," he writes, "consisted mostly of cradles and beds. Children lay on ironing boards and chairs, children in cradles and beds."¹⁵ Baptisms and funerals were the most common events of the house. The food was deficient in quality, even though there was no absolute

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³ *Ensam*.

¹⁴ His nurse suffered from some kind of nervous disease.

¹⁵ *Tjänstekvinnans son, Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, p. 12.

lack of it. John's¹⁶ "entire youth reminded him of a long starvation."¹⁷ And when once treated to a square meal and a couple of drams, this, as it might seem, unimportant event had a most decided influence on his religiously brooding mind.

The same unfortunate circumstances extended also to other conditions of life. His home-made gymnasium cap—and this even at a period when the prosperity of the home had noticeably increased, his sleeves that reached only to the elbow, his trousers that left a considerable part of his lower extremities uncovered, all were sources of exquisite and continual torture to his sensitive nature. In direct keeping with conditions existing in the house were the influences from without. The scenery from his window consisted largely of roofs and chimneys. The only place outside of the three rooms available for play ground was an inhospitable, dark, well-like back yard, so often met with in large cities, with its refuse boxes, closets, wood sheds and rats. Such an environment must have had a decidedly harmful influence on an organism of inborn, long-ing desire for the beautiful in nature. When he for the first time, from a hill side, saw the archipelago of Stockholm spreading out before him in its varied, charming beauty of innumerable, firth-embraced islets, he experienced a sensation similar to a chill. He forgot duties and comrades.¹⁸ This devotional attitude towards nature remained characteristic of him throughout life. In a strict sense, he was never irreligious, for during the so-called materialistic period of his forties, he worshipped nature with all the fervor of his passionate soul. Never does he become so despondent, never so hopelessly pessimistic, that a beautiful landscape can not at once stir him to the highest poetic fancy.

But that which, assuredly, had greater effect on his early mental growth than both the sordid surroundings and the material wants was the unsympathetic attitude of his parents. They never seemed to understand their love-thirsting little son. Both had favorites among the other children. No sympathy was left for John. When he sought to win them, especially the

¹⁶ Strindberg's baptismal name and the name by which he designated himself in the *Bondwoman's Son*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

mother, for himself, he was coldly repelled. And when failing to be understood by his own mother, how could he hope to be understood by the world? "His sympathy for humanity would remain unrequited, since their thoughts did not coincide with his. Afterwards he would go about offering his heart to the first one that came along, but no one would receive it, for it was strange to them; he would draw himself back within himself, wounded, humiliated, unnoticed, passed by."¹⁹ In being perpetually misunderstood lay much of the bitterness of his life. He was told to put great requirements upon himself. He did so. But then he demanded of those about him to do likewise. It often happened that he was severely punished, while his brothers would go free. His keen sense of justice was offended, and he protested. But then, when considered jealous, he became reserved, introspective, melancholic and brooding. And so a seed had been sown which, in the course of time, was to develop into a strongly self-critical and self-torturing disposition, an element most vital, it is true, in forming the uniqueness of his productions, but which, when carried to its extreme, became morbid. There were two similar incidents which left deep, indelible scars in his childhood memories, poisoning his entire life by an ingredient of smarting bitterness. Time and again we meet with references in his works which are traceable directly to these events. Once there was the question of some wine having disappeared from a bottle;²⁰ the other time it concerned some wagon-burs, which his father suspected that he had stolen.²¹ At both times he was forced to plead guilty to the crimes, which he never had committed. Many of his hasty accusations might have been unwritten, many a fierce invective against home and humanity might have remained unspoken had it not been for those pedagogical mistakes on the part of his father.

Concerning his school days, again we may say that his lot was neither better nor worse than that of the average school boy of those days; and again we must attribute his sad experiences to a temperament so sensitive that pressure, under any form, at once took the most exaggerated proportions. He always was

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

the youngest pupil in his class. In spite of the fact that his credits entitled him to promotion, he was kept back not less than three years "in order to ripen,"²² as it was euphemistically expressed. Perchance he did ripen, but the retardation was a bore to him which left its traces. Unlike Rousseau, with whom he otherwise had so much in common, he never could, he tells us, think of the time he spent at a certain school without a strong feeling of disgust. The epithets he applied to it are often coarse. Later in life, when reading books, he always skipped those passages which referred to school memories.

The semesters he spent at the University of Uppsala for the purpose of obtaining a degree, were still more trying. The only help received from home during his first Uppsala period was a "box of cigars and an exhortation to help himself."²³ He lacked the means by which he could obtain proper instruction and necessary books. He suffered at times from want of food, even to the point of starvation, and during the winter months, lacking fuel, he had to remain in bed in order to keep warm.²⁴ He sought to compensate himself by associating with liberal friends at the cafés. He had a natural inclination for strong drinks; his habits became disturbingly irregular. The result was that he made little or no progress academically. It must be acknowledged, however, that this was more on account of the professors' narrowmindedness and absolute inability to understand him, than by reason of inability and lack of knowledge on his part. As a matter of fact, he knew considerably more than his courses actually required. At the customary oral individual examinations, however well he knew his subject, he usually suffered from inhibition of speech, or from what he believed were attacks of *aphasia*,²⁵ to which he also attributes his inability to make public speeches and to speak foreign languages. At other instances he would be seized by an unconquerable spirit of contradiction, which, of course, quickly extinguished whatsoever little flickering spark of good will others might have had for him.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 100.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

²⁴ *Jäsningsstiden*, *Ibid.*, p. 435, and the sketch *Mellan drabbningarna in Fjärdingen och Svarlbäcken. I Vårbrytningen. Sam. skr.*, v. III.

²⁵ *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, pp. 64, 441.

To these varied and, for a harmonious growth, disturbing influences at home and at school, of jarring environment and misdirected parental zeal, of petty animosity and cruel fate, we must also add the struggles of his own inner thoughts, pathological almost from the beginning, in their convulsive frenzy. An inborn religious feeling, nursed by a mother's and a step-mother's narrowly pietistic views and the anaemic religiousness of his first love, intensified by the remorse of the usual boyhood, puberty transgressions,—so closely connected with all early, so-called spiritual awakenings,—it is these religious feelings, with ascetic ideals and self-renunciations, which fight their bitter contests with an equally strong sensuality and a growing knowledge and intellect. It is asceticism against sensualism, mysticism against positivism, tradition contra scepticism, in a word, it is the life and death struggle between "the old and the new man."

Apparently the new man won, but only for a time, as we shall see. Strindberg could never forget the past, and herein we have another cause for his life's many fitful fevers; fevers that got their first literary expression in his "Free-Thinker," in "Master Olof," and "The Red Room" with the impressionistic force of a wounded soul.

His thoughts demanded expression, nay, they insisted on being proclaimed loudly to the world. A literary confession of his innermost thoughts was for Strindberg a question of life and death. If he had been prevented from heralding his ideas, from opening his heart, he would have committed suicide, or gone completely insane. Indeed, he made several attempts to end his life, as we shall have occasion to speak of later. The aesthetic element in his productions was never the most important with him, but reform, revolution, truth. When people misunderstood his intentions, despised his endeavors, misinterpreted his thoughts, black-mailed him, scorned him, his whole being was filled with wrath, and he shook his fist in wild, frantic despair²⁶ against home, humanity, against God and religion, and lastly even against himself. He became the poet of:

The great beautiful hate.²⁷

²⁶ *I hafsbandet, Sam. skr.*, v. XXIV, p. 242.

²⁷ *Dikter, Sam. skr.*, v. XIII, p. 29.

Strindberg is a "Naturwesen" whose longing for freedom is unlimited, and whose consideration for the existing condition is nil; a natural phenomenon who responds only to his own laws; untamable, strange, incalculable.²⁸ As a boy he breaks open the chest if the key is not at hand. Electric machines, inventions, which it has taken days or weeks to construct, are impatiently smashed at the very instant when he is about to finish them.²⁹ When he, as a youth, for the first time became intoxicated, he had hallucinations.³⁰ In a moment of weakness he chanced to promise a birthday poem to an adored one, a kitchen wench, by the way, of slightly questionable reputation. But meter, strange as it may seem, was at this time an utter impossibility for the future poet. A friend came to his rescue, but when the origin of the verses was discovered, he escaped to the woods as a wounded animal in utter despair.³¹ When his first accepted drama³² was presented on the stage, he was so deeply affected by its naïve faults,—he was then twenty-two, and the playlet was written the year before,—that he rushed out with the intention of drowning himself.

There is a scene in his autobiographical work "In the Red Room" (not to be confused with the novel "The Red Room") which in one single stroke exposes the whole emotional impulsiveness of his passionate temperament:

"But, wherever he went, along the shore, over the fences and into the woods, contours and colors began to flow together, as though he saw everything through a mist of tears. Soul anguish, twinges of conscience, remorse, shame, began to disintegrate his mind, and the seams of consciousness were loosened. Old thoughts emerged of a life purpose misspent, of a humanity that suffered through mistakes and delusions. This suffering expanded his ego. The impression of fighting an evil force lashed his powers of resistance into a wild opposition; the desire to struggle against fate awoke in him, and from a picket fence he tore a long pointed stake. It became in his hand a spear

²⁸ Cf. Johan Mortenson's Introduction, *Sveriges national-litteratur 1500–1900*, v. XXII.

²⁹ *Tjänstekvinnans son*, *Sam. skr.*, V. XVIII, p. 97 ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³² *I Rom*.

and a club. He rushed into the woods, beating down branches about him as though he were fighting murky giants. He trampled mushrooms under his feet as though he were crushing the empty skulls of so many dwarfs. He shouted as if he would arouse the wolves and foxes, and up! up! up! rolled the cry in the pine forest. He finally came to a cliff which almost vertically raised itself like a wall before him. He beat against it with his spear, as though to overthrow it, and then he stormed it. Under his hand bushes, torn up by the roots, crashed and rattled down the hill; stones clattered down; he put his foot on young junipers and lashed them till they lay broken as down-trodden grass. He clambered up and stood on the hilly plateau. There lay the archipelago and beyond it the ocean in a large broad panorama. He inhaled as if for the first time he had found breathing space. But a naked pine, taller than he, stood on the cliff. With the spear in one hand he climbed up, and on the top that formed a saddle, he sat like an equestrian. Then he removed his belt and hung it around a branch, descended from the tree and brought up a large stone which he laid in the tightly drawn belt that represented a sling. Now he had nothing but the heavens above him. But below him stood the evergreen forest, head upon head, like an army that stormed his castle. Beyond it surged the billows that came toward him wave after wave as white Cossacks cavalry; and beyond them lay the rocky islets like a fleet of monitors.

"Come on!" he cried and swung his spear, 'come hundreds, come thousands!' he shouted and then he spurred his tall wooden horse and shook his spear.

"The September wind blew from the bay, and the sun went down. The spruce forest beneath him became a murmuring mob. And now he wished to speak to it. But it merely murmured unintelligible words and answered, 'wood' when he spoke to it.

" 'Jesus or Barabbas!' he bellowed, 'Jesus or Barabbas!'

" 'Barabbas, of course,' he answered himself as he waited for a response. The darkness fell and he was afraid. He dismounted from the saddle and went home.

"Was he mad? No! He was only a poet who composed out in the forest instead of at his writing desk. But he hoped that

he was insane, he longed for the darkness to blot out his light, since he saw no hope shining in the darkness."³³

Mad! No, not mad, but it is certainly dwelling upon the borderland of those terribly fantastic regions of human consciousness where the beautifully balanced harmony of self is no more, and the ghostly spirits of discord reign supreme.

II

TRAITS OF ABNORMALITY FROM "MASTER OLOF" TO "INFERNO"

Some of the most widely read works from Strindberg's early period are "Master Olof," "The Red Room," "The New Kingdom," "Swedish Events," "Poems," "The Nights of Sleepwalking," "The Wanderings of Lucky-Per," "Marriage I," and "Real Utopias." It would be difficult to describe the peculiar and poignantly delicious satisfaction experienced in reading books like these, by one whose aesthetic cravings heretofore had been mainly satisfied with Bible history and catechism and, at solemn occasions, with poetry of the "Evangeline" and "Angelica" type. It is something of that feeling of expansion, of exuberant vitality one experiences on a beautiful spring morning, after having been a whole winter confined in close, dusty rooms, in being suddenly transferred to a rocky plateau close to the sea, where the view is unobstructed and the air invigorating, while a salt-laden breeze scatters the shadows of night. Pulses quicken, thoughts take on wings; feelings that youth often harbored, but never dared disclose, even to intimate friends, are here freely expressed. Fructified by his powerful soul, new, daring ideas are continually conceived and born.

It was something of this infinite delight which Young Sweden felt, when August Strindberg's rebellious thoughts flashed through the sultry, wine-colored, after-dinner atmosphere of the sixties and seventies. There are soft, tender moods also in his books, but also youthful haughtiness and potential vitality as well, fresh northern winds and the clang of tempered steel, spring-floods that sweep everything before them. Old murky institutions trembled on their foundations. Instead of a pale yearning romanticism one was treated to the strong naturalistic wine of the eighties.

³³ *I röda rummet*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XIX, pp. 93-95.

It is incomprehensible how August Strindberg, in this first literary period, could in the true sense of the word be charged with dark pessimism.¹ Was it not rather the proud scorn of a young iconoclast? He lashed with unmerciful sarcasm "The gods of time," dutifully worshipped by pharisaic patriots. With perfect surgical skill, he dissected the cancers of social and political corruption and held them up to the light. He trampled on what he believed to be but illusions of a stagnant imagination or mere constructions of egotistic coteries; but he did it all, because he fervently believed that if we could only learn to see how hopelessly deformed and stigmatized existing society really is, true progress would be possible. He may have been at times deeply despondent, but back of caustic invectives and drastic pictures, which lovers of all existing conditions have termed pessimistic creations of a sordid mind, we discern "Loke's"

"Ever young hope."²

He had, as every enthusiastic young reformer, that happy pragmatic conception of the world: it is bad, but it may become better.

Who could, from the reading of these books, have predicted that this tall viking warrior, before whose terrible onslaughts large fragments of the murky walls of antiquated conceptions fell to the ground, in his old days should busy himself with amulets, tax his brain with explanations of theosophic emanations, or seek conference with Swedenborgian spirits; nay worse, that he, lashed by the furies of night, should speed from place to place like a wounded beast?

And still, mayhap, a more keensighted psychiatrist could already from the beginning have scented a strongly neuropathic disposition. Book printer Gert, one of those characters with whom the dramatist identifies himself "as he was in passionate moments,"³ is a revolutionary fanatic. We are at this time not acquainted with Strindberg's subjective procedure, since his autobiographical books have as yet not been published. Hence we must be very cautious lest we should arrive at un-

¹ Cf. David av Wirsén, *Kritiker*.

² *Dikter, Sam. skr.*, v. XIII, *Lokes smädelser*, p. 37.

³ *I röda rummet, Sam. skr.*, v. XIX, p. 32.

warranted conclusions by a too free identification of subject and object. But we are justified by the intensity of certain characteristic traits to infer the close relationship between the author and his heroes. In the ingenious novel "For Higher Purposes," the sensitive minister, as a result of narrow dogmas and idiotic decrees, goes mad. That the exposition here is made by a sympathetic, deeply understanding master mind, which itself is but too familiar with the morbid emotions of consciousness, is undeniable.

In "Remorse" we have again one of those masterly, unsurpassable, sympathetically made analyses of a condition in which the fine mechanism of the soul has become disordered. Read for example the following lines:—

"He hardly thought any more, for all the activities of his soul lay as in a mortar stirred to a mush. Thoughts attempted to crystallize, but dissolved and floated away, memories, hopes, malice, tender feelings and a single great hate against all wrong, which through an unprobed natural force had come to govern the world, melted together in his mind as if an inner fire had suddenly raised the temperature and forced all solid particles to assume a liquid form."⁴ . . . or "He dropped the book for he heard some one who screeched and thumped in his own bed! Who was in the bed? He saw a body whose abdomen was contracted with cramps and whose chest bulged out as the hoops of a wooden bucket, and he heard a wonderful, hollow voice that screeched under the sheets. It was his own body!"⁵

It is Strindberg himself who has experienced this. As far as our limited material has enabled us to ascertain, the first time that we publicly hear that his productions are purely of a pathological stamp is in the year 1883, when a collection of his poems was published.⁶ Granting some irregularities in the composition, many of which are purposely affected, any one who has read the poems must admit that such a statement must have been caused by personal enmity. C. D. of Wirsén, Strindberg's irreconcilable adversary, had greater cause by far to stamp the author of "The Bondwoman's Son"⁷ as abnormal,

⁴ *Utopier i verkligheten*, Sam. skr., v. XV, p. 187.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶ *Ny Svensk tidskrift*, pp. 77-84.

⁷ Parts I-III appeared 1886-1887.

especially since there is no longer any question of an objective work of art, but it is frankly admitted to be strictly autobiographical.

As we have already pointed out in the previous chapter, Strindberg himself makes no secret of the fact that from early childhood he may have carried a dangerous germ of disease. On page 53 of "The Bondwoman's Son" he writes:

"He remains irregular and from now on ever fickle minded. Fickleness, caprice, of "diabls noirs," as the French call it, is not a fully explained phenomenon. The victim is possessed, he wishes to do one thing but does the opposite; he suffers from the desire to inflict evil upon himself and almost enjoys self-torture. This is a soul-sickness, a disease of the will," a view which his parents and brothers did not seem to have any desire to contradict.⁸ That he believed himself to be suffering from aphasia has already been touched upon.⁹ "He came scared to the world and he lived" we are told, "in continued fear of life and men."¹⁰ From the start he manifested a fear of public gatherings and of open places that bordered on *agoraphobia*.¹¹ Further we learn of several more or less earnest suicidal attempts. If the mother instinct of the human organism has become so weakened by disturbing influences that suicidal attempts are made possible, it seems to point to a serious defect in the mechanism's normal equilibrium.

At the end of his second University period his state of mind was so critically serious that his friends in real earnest considered him mad. At an earlier time they had been forced to watch over him night and day. In order to prevent a forced confinement, he himself wrote to an insane asylum and asked for admission. This was refused, a fact which, of course, indicates that the specialist did not consider the symptoms very dangerous. Probably the real reason for the refusal was that he took the first step himself, which is rather a deviation from the common behavior of similarly afflicted persons. But all this could probably be looked upon as a terminated stage in his life, if his subsequent production did not occasion other reflections.

⁸ *Tjänstekvinnans son, Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, pp. 55, 67, 74.

⁹ See above, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹ *Jäsningsliden, Ibid.*, p. 316.

Even in those works by which his genius has celebrated its greatest intellectual triumphs, for example, in "The Father," and "At the Edge of the Sea," he has depicted the soul-sickness of his heroes with such ominously fatal power, with such strength as to give one a presentiment that here it is not only a question of masterly objective creations, but actual life experiences which have been treated with consummate skill. One has a distinct perception that here we are confronted with observations, based upon profound introspective studies, that here we have before us a man "who, like Dante, has seen the nethermost hell."¹² Under the "big brains," keen thought analysis, and magnificently daring intellectuality, broods a Saul's sick spirit, a glowing mysticism with its roots in the organism itself. Now and then we meet with words, whose nervously trembling immediacy points to a rapidly approaching crisis.

It is also by reason of the "Father" that Strindberg's former friends and protectors, George Brandes and Björnstjerne Björnson put him under the ban and spread the report over the entire North that the author, who had written "The Father" was *en gal mand*—a mad man. A rumor was even circulating that Strindberg really had lived through a period of madness on a Danish island, and that he was ripe for the insane asylum, a rumor which the biographer adds, "was mere literary tea gossip."¹³

If "The Father," by eminent critics pronounced to be a consummate masterpiece of dramatic tragedy, of closely knit plot and almost abysmal knowledge of human nature,¹⁴ a drama which has repeatedly won laurels on the German, French, and lately also on the American stage, could earn him such an epithet, what should not then result from making immediate acquaintance with a being so madly torn to pieces, so bitterly disillusionized from life's and love's fair dreams as the author of "The Defense of a Fool"?¹⁵ It is a story of a slowly disintegrating home happiness, or should I say of a vanishing ideal, re-

¹² Huneker, *Iconoclasts*, p. 151.

¹³ Gustaf Uddgren: *En ny bok om Strindberg*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Johan Mortenson: *Sveriges national-litteratur*, v. XVII, p. 10.

¹⁵ Oscar Levantin, *Diktare och drömmare*, p. 233. Cf. also Huneker, *Iconoclasts*, and E. Björkman, *Forum*, v. 47, pp. 274-288.

lated to us with brutal sincerity by a man who not only had to fight human enemies,—and he had many,—but what is infinitely more difficult, his own treacherous thoughts. Strindberg, the great worshipper of unconditional truthfulness, has himself confessed, “This is a terrible book, I fully admit, and I regret that I ever wrote it.”¹⁶ It was intended as the last document of one who had resolved to die. More than once, when reading it, one sees, as in a vision, a bare, bleeding heart.

“Analyze, dissect, diagnose” is the continual demand of a dilettantic, psychology-mad public of our day, as if it were possible to diagnose the death agonies of a bruised soul. One does not analyze a cry. All he can do is to give a fairly accurate description of certain functional abnormalities, and the possible causes for their appearance.

The first incident in “The Defense of a Fool” which strikes us with peculiar force is, I suppose, the fantastic suicidal attempt described in the fifth chapter. Strindberg had met with the Baroness, who later, divorced from her husband, was to become his wife. The consuming fire of love had taken possession of his soul. Knowing himself, and fully aware of the danger of the situation, he decided to disappear from the scene. He was already on board a steamer on his way to Paris, when a sudden “inexpressible longing to see her again” took possession of him with such an irresistible power that he prevailed upon the captain to put him ashore. Once ashore, however, he recognized the hopelessness and disgrace of the condition. He writes:

“And now that everything was at an end, I longed to die, for life without her was impossible.

“But, with the cunning of a mad man, I decided to get some satisfaction out of my death by contracting pneumonia, or a similar fatal disease, for in that case, I argued, I should have to lie in bed for some time; I could see her again and kiss her hand in saying goodbye forever. . . .

“The coast was precipitous and the water deep; everything was as it should be. With careful attention, which betrayed nothing of my sinister purpose, I undressed myself . . . the wind was cold, at this time of the year, in October, the temperature of the water could be but a very few degrees above freezing

¹⁶ Introductory remarks of the Author, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, p. 5.

point. I took a run over the rocks and threw myself headlong into the water, aiming at a cleft between two gigantic waves. I felt as if I had fallen into red-hot lava. But I came quickly to the surface, dragging up with me pieces of seaweed which I had glimpsed at the bottom, and the tiny vesicles of which were scratching my legs. I swam out into the open sea, breasting the huge waves, greeted by the laughter of the sea gulls and the cawing of the crows. When my strength began to fail, I turned and swam back to the cliff.

"Now the moment of greatest importance had arrived. According to all instructions given to bathers, the real danger consists in remaining too long out of the water in a state of nudity. I sat down on the rock which was most fully exposed to the wind, and allowed the October gale to lash my bare back. My muscles, my chest immediately contracted, as if the instinct of self-preservation would protect the vital organs at any price. But I was unable to remain on the same spot, and, seizing the branch of an alder tree, I climbed to its top. The tree swayed with the convulsive, uncontrollable movements of my muscles. In this way I succeeded in remaining in the same place for some time. The icy air scorched my lungs like a red-hot iron.

"At last I was convinced that I had attained my end, and hastily dressed myself.

"In the meantime the night had fallen. When I reëntered the wood it was quite dark. Terror seized me, I knocked my head against the lower branches of the trees, and was obliged to feel my way along. Suddenly, under the influence of my unreasonable fear, my senses became so acute that I could tell the variety of the trees which surrounded me by the rustling of their branches. What depth there was in the base of the Scotch firs, with the firm and closely-set needles, forming, as it were, gigantic mouth organs. The tall and more pliable stems of the pines gave a higher note; their sibilant fife resembled the hissing of a thousand snakes . . . the gale tore off the branches of an alder tree, and they crashed to the ground with a hollow thud. I could have distinguished a pine cone from the cone of the Scotch fir by the sound it made in falling; my sense of smell detected the proximity of a mushroom, and the nerves

of my large toe seemed to feel whether it trod on soil, clubmoss or maiden hair."¹⁷

The very literary excellency of the account somewhat weakens its pathological value, but so much we can take for granted, that no one without a morbid emotional temperament would very likely indulge in such extravagant death experiments. The last paragraph reads like a prologue to the description of the hyperaesthetic condition of his senses, which later found so prominent a place in the "Blue Books."

But this incident is only the drastic preliminary scene in this sad tragedy, extending through a period of ten years. More serious indictments can be brought against him. Dr. Hirsch, who has given us a short, rather positive analysis of Strindberg's mental state based upon "The Defense of a Fool," does not hesitate to charge him with "a manifest case of jealous insanity."¹⁸ From the very first Strindberg suspects his wife of illicit relations with other men, and not only with other men, but also of unnatural desires for members of her own sex. And though he is unable to adduce a single positive proof, he is nevertheless haunted by the oppressive thoughts. He may feel at ease for a short period, but a "strange reflection in the expression of her face" is enough to make the "smouldering jealousy burst into fierce flames."¹⁹ A look in the direction of "her feet," a kiss by a relative, or the "exposure of her shoulder" to the servant girl, may prove sufficient reason for him to cause unpleasant family scenes or to hurl grave charges of immorality into her face. Time and again, he makes up his mind to break forever the degrading union, but the sight of her "ankle," "a tiny piece of stocking," "the garter," sends him whining to her feet, humbles him in the dust, begging for pardon. Not less than six times he tries to escape. All in vain. The love for his wife

¹⁷ *En dâres försvarstal*, v. XXVI, pp. 123, 124.

For this translation, as well as other direct quotations from "En dâres försvarstal" I am indebted to Ellie Sleussner's translation, "The Confession of a Fool." At the time of writing neither the French original, "Le plaidoyer d'un fou," nor John Landquist's undoubtedly more faithful rendering into Swedish, were at my disposal. In comparing the two translations, I find considerable discrepancies but none that is of material importance for the purpose at hand. All other translations are my own.

¹⁸ Dr. Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration*, pp. 221-225.

¹⁹ *En dâres försvarstal*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVI, p. 294.

seizes him anew, and he returns to his family, the last time, however, with the firm resolve to write the story of his life and die.

Moreover, we meet with several other instances of abnormality, of unmotivated *self-reference*. "There was a hidden meaning in the laughing words," an accidental remark, "a whispering conversation," the smile of a friend, all are instantly interpreted as personal insults or as referring to his wife's moral conduct. Words and phrases long forgotten come back to his mind and are eagerly snatched up and cleverly forced to throw new light on the situation. The most remarkable manifestation of this trait in this book is where the author makes use of every detail in "The Wild Duck" to show that Ibsen had written the play for the express purpose of exposing Strindberg's family secrets, intended, he seems to believe, as a retaliation for his stand on the woman-question. In this case, as usually, the self-referential sensitiveness is most intimately connected with *persecutory delusions*.

Almost from the beginning he accuses his wife of entering secret conspiracies with friends and foes alike, furnishing them with material for newspaper articles and brochures, in which he is branded as an insane misogynist, a criminal, who ought to be placed in confinement. It was in order to escape intrigues and persecutions that he left Sweden in 1883; it was in order to escape intrigues and "sexless women," blue-stockings, who like octopi sucked dry his home happiness, that he repeatedly changed his whereabouts, while abroad. But now he recognized that definite "symptoms of persecutorial mania"²⁰ began to appear. "He tried to get into touch with strangers. But they treated him with the forbearance which a sane person usually shows to a lunatic."²¹ He writes to his friends in Sweden, but with the same results. Now and then his suspicions seem absurd to him, and he exerts himself to the utmost to shake them off; but, like a single obsessing idea, the doubts of his wife's constancy, the legitimacy of his children and, lastly, of his own sanity come back to him with ever increasing irresistibility.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

In spite of his emotional temperament Strindberg for the most part showed good control over his actions, but in two instances he confesses that, moved as by a "sudden impulse" he maltreated his wife. At both times, it is the children who prevent more serious consequences. In addition to referential and persecutory delusions we generally find more or less of *expansive delusions*, a trait which also may be detected in "The Defense of a Fool." Everywhere he speaks about himself as the "aristocrat of the brain," "the renowned scholar," "a famous writer." All these seem to indicate, as Dr. Hirsch has pointed out, a case of *paranoia simplex chronica*.²² But with a knowledge of Strindberg's later development, I think he now would have considerably to reconstruct his view, "as no case of genuine paranoia ever recovers."²³ Considered by themselves the absurdities adduced appear serious indeed, but to do so without a few words of explanation would not be doing Strindberg full justice. It is true that Strindberg's ego is a very prominent factor in "The Defense of a Fool," as well as in the greatest part of his works, but in this he is at least not alone among the great writers. Neither Goethe nor Schopenhauer had very humble opinions of themselves. Dante stated rather frankly what he considered to be his place among the greatest men of letters. Voltaire and especially Rousseau are other familiar examples. The reason probably is, as Strindberg states it, that if prominent men attract attention to themselves, it is because they have a larger self than other people. We must also remember that Strindberg, even at this time, actually was what he professed to be, "a famous author," and that he was recognized as such throughout Europe no matter what Dr. Hirsch's personal opinion may be with regard to the value of his writings.

Strindberg may have been a slave under the quenchless fire of his passions; he may have been ridiculously jealous, unfoundedly suspicious, at times, but he had grave reasons to be. Both Dr. Hirsch and others of his judges might have murmured quite distinctly had they been subjected to similar matrimonial stimuli. "His passionate misogamy and other absurdities"²⁴ might have appeared to them in a more natural

²² *Genius and Degeneration*, p. 224.

²³ Diefendorf, *Clinical psychiatry*, p. 342.

²⁴ Dr. Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration*, p. 220.

light. "I know no other work," writes John Landquist in his "Philosophic Essays," "which infused such sympathy for Strindberg as this settlement, 'The Defense of a Fool.'"²⁵ With regard to his delusions of persecution, the following remarks seem to be quite justified: "She triumphed. I was on the verge of insanity, and the first symptoms of persecutorial mania showed themselves. Mania? Did I say mania? I *was* being persecuted, there was nothing irrational in the thought."²⁶ Few authors have been more ruthlessly abused than Strindberg. And that his wife actually did spread reports of his mental derangement, there is hardly any room for doubt. The sudden impulsive acts, too, when closely scrutinized, lose a good deal of their impulsiveness. They are simply the natural discharge of ten years' brooding thoughts, and as such are to be widely differentiated from what is usually understood as "impulsive insanity." It is simply the lack of self-control at an unguarded moment such as any man may be guilty of at one time or another of his life.

When all has been said, perchance it is life's terrible realities that take us aback, and the tremendous earnestness with which he has exposed, not only the lighter fads and foibles, lyric fancies and fair heavens, but also and especially the strange misgivings and sinister thoughts lurking in the most obscure crevices of the soul's nethermost pits. Or may be that just this honest openness, this childlike frankness is one of August Strindberg's greatest mental abnormalities. Certainly it is not the way in which common mortals behave.

III

INFERNO

In "The Defense of a Fool" the apparent absurdities were so strangely and inseparably fused with perfect sanity of ideation and judgment that a single sweeping statement as to Strindberg's mental condition seemed unwarranted. Even when describing his most luxuriant idea of self-reference, the identification of his own affairs with the story of "The Wild Duck," there seems to be some insight into the real character

²⁵ Landquist, *Filosofiska essayer*, p. 294.

²⁶ *En dâres försvarstal*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, p. 317.

of his misconception, which is revealed with a sly touch of humor in the following words:

"I knew that my conclusion was not altogether sound, nevertheless I had arrived at a conclusion of some sort."¹

But when we read "*Inferno*" (1897) it is no longer possible to doubt that we are brought into contact with a seriously unbalanced mind. He suffers from a fully developed system of delusions of persecution, self-reference and expansion, hallucinations of hearing and feeling and moments of elation, experiences which finally terminate in a Swedenborgian-Theosophic "*Weltanschauung*."

A few paragraphs, selected from the first part of the book, will give us an excellent conception of its content:

"I pass the terrible rue de la Gaïete, where the artificial joy of the crowd has a painful effect, and the gloomy and silent rue Delambre, a street which more than any other in the district can make one despair, I turn on to boulevard Montparnasse and sink down on a chair in front of Brasserie des Lilas.

"A good absinthe consoles me for a few minutes, after that I am attacked by a company of grisettes and students, who hit me in the face with switches, and haunted as by furies I sacrifice my absinthe and hurry to get another at the Café Francois Premier.

"It was like jumping from the ashes into the fire; another crowd grins at me. Look at the recluse! And I flee, lashed by the Eumenides, to my home, with the nefarious strain in my ears."²

"The thought of chastisement as the result of a crime does not appear. I play the part of an innocent, the object of an unjust persecution. The Unknown prevented me from completing my great work (Strindberg had for several years been occupied by scientific investigations), and it was necessary to break down the obstacles before the crown of victory could be won.

"I have been in the wrong; nevertheless I am in the right and shall obtain right.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

² *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, p. 11.

"This Christmas night I slept badly, a cold current of air swept repeatedly over my face."³

"In the evening I go out for a walk in the dreary district and I pass the Saint-Martin canal, which is black as night and seems to be constructed solely to drown oneself in. I pause at the corner of rue Alibert. Who is he? Was not that graphite, which the chemist found in my sulphur analysis, called Alibert graphite? What then? It is foolish, but I cannot prevent the impression of something inexpressible from lingering in my mind. . . . Rue Beaurepaire. Just a 'beautiful retreat' for criminals. . . . Rue de Bondy. . . . Am I led by a demon? . . . I stop reading the street signs, I go astray, try to turn back the same way without finding it, shrink back from an enormous shed which stinks raw meat and stale vegetables, especially sauerkraut. . . . Suspicious persons brush by me and give vent to coarse words. . . . I am afraid of the Unknown, turn off to the right, to the left, chance upon a dirty alley, a dumping ground for slops, vice and crime. Street nymphs block my road, gangs of thieving boys grin at me. Who is it that prepares these ambushes for me as quickly as I free myself from the world and men? It is some one who has let me fall into this snare! Where is he, so that I may wrestle with him"?⁴

Besides the fully developed symptoms of persecution and self-reference and the fear of open places, referred to in the second chapter, we meet with two distinctly new elements, signs of hallucinations and a superstitiously mystic attitude. In "The Defense of a Fool" he stands on an incomparably sounder foundation. Everything is there interpreted from a strictly rationalistic point of view. What has taken place between 1888 and 1896, the year in which his malady appeared in its most acute form? Or rather, let us at this point take a step still further back and inquire, what has transformed the proud iconoclast of "The Red Room" and "New Kingdom" to the haunted, tragic figure we meet with in "Inferno"?

In the latter half of the nineteenth century a new, powerful wave of extreme rationalism swept over Europe, similar in character to the pride of enlightenment of the seventeenth, but

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

more far-reaching and penetrating in its consequences. The many discoveries within the pale of Semitic philology and science, the youthful, but extraordinarily precocious, science of psychology, not to be forgotten, led man to believe that he had in his hand the key to the secrets of the universe. There was hardly any limit to the power of his thoughts. Away, therefore, with all romantic phantasms, and reactionary constructions. Man had finally arrived at maturity, and childish stories could henceforth be dispensed with. If milk under any form had to be tolerated, serve it to the undeveloped, mental weaklings, for whose crippled digestive organs the substantial, rationalistic food might yet, for a few years, prove too strong. The intellect is our guidance, the only creature to the honor of whom we will burn our incense and offer sacrifice. Emotions, feelings belong to an earlier stage of human development and are now not only unnecessary, but actually harmful ingredients,⁵ in the process of intellectual self-aggrandizement.

No one did the scientific fever affect more strongly than August Strindberg. With the whole force of his tremendous energy, he put himself, as we have seen, to the task of disillusionizing mankind. Partly he succeeded. A whole company of impetuous youths both in Sweden and Germany rallied to his standard. Fiercely they fought to overthrow what was considered old or unsound, in order to make room for the young and vernal. But the young was still too young, the vernal yet too tender. When he paused and looked about, he did not find the green fields of his dream, he found only smoking ruins; and he heard but curses and angry words in connection with his name. Then the scourge of remorse smote him heavily. And, as a matter of fact, his warm unreasonable heart had felt but ill at ease in the cold iron grip of determinism. "The old blasphemer began to worship the altars he had burned."

This is a free but fair résumé of contemporary criticisms, which involves the causes and motives of August Strindberg's "sudden" leap from the extreme naturalistic position, formulated in the novel "At the Edge of the Sea" to the undignified

⁵ *Författaren, Sam. skr.*, v. XIX, p. 248.

I havsbandet, Sam. skr., v. XXIV, p. 48.

cabalistic, middle age philosophy manifest in his "Inferno," "Legends," and later also in his "Blue Books."⁶

It is not strange that the official book reviewers in their necessarily hurried and slipshod manner of treating all that comes in their way, should seize upon the first respectable thought entering their mind; but that a genius like Oscar Levertin, who was personally acquainted with the author and thoroughly familiar with his works, emphasized only this purely psychic cause for the change is more remarkable. That burned altars and the cries of woe should exert a powerful influence on a sensitive temperament is evident. That the strongly emotional element in Strindberg's nature did not find its full expression during his naturalistic period is a vital fact which ought not to be lost sight of.

"Oh, well I knew long time ago,
That cells are not the food for souls."⁷

uttered in 1884 proved a prophetic word. To indulge in intellectual mountain-climbing is invigorating, but in the cold regions of "Die reine Vernunft" tender emotions are not at home. They yearn for the winter evening's and the picture book's fancy-feeding atmosphere, for the dream-castles of puberty. So begins the descent. But up there on the heights of reason were uttered many irreverent and challenging words, which now depress the spirit and disturb the sleep. With the desired sweetness of the childhood dreams mingle the recollections of wrongs. The fancies of youth receive an unsavory tincture of remorse.

But however important this emotional element is, and however satisfactorily it may be applied in explaining the conversion of such a writer as Huysmans, and made to account for the remarkable change, two or three decades ago, from English scepticism to nonsensical American spiritualism, it is certainly not the all-sufficient logical principle in the Strindberg case. The most important causes are constitutional, complicated and

⁶ See the criticisms in *Ord och bild* and *Nordisk tidskrift* for 1897 and 1898. Levertin's *Diktare och drömmare*, pp. 186-195; 239-247; cf. also Esswein, *August Strindberg*, pp. 102, 103.

⁷ *Sömngångarnätter*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XIII, p. 270. Ack, det jag viste väl långt förut att man ej mättar själar med celler!

intensified by intimate personal experiences. If this had been recognized, much unjust criticism might have remained unuttered. That his delusions of persecution originated at a period of physical weakness and more than usual mental strain can easily be proven, but we shall also endeavor to show that his cabalistic "*Weltanschauung*" has a similar psycho-physical ancestry. If we are careful, it may even be possible to discern the different stages of their development:

I. Nursed in a soil of morbidly emotional temperament, rendered still more susceptible by mental strains and physical illness, well-founded suspicions gradually develop into a suspicious mood with transitory delusions of persecution, which, however, are recognized as such, or rest on a rational basis.

II. With increased bodily weakness, caused both by unhappy family relations and hard work, probably also by excesses, hallucinations appear. And when unable to explain his vivid experiences by natural means, supernatural agencies are introduced, a course of events conditioned also by earlier religious experiences and by later scientific and theosophic studies.

III. If he is continually persecuted and subjected to all the tortures of hell, there must be some reasons for it. He has probed into the secrets of the supernatural; he has committed crimes, probably in a pre-existent state. But if the Powers take such trouble to purge and direct him, he must evidently have been chosen for some great mission.

IV. Being acquainted with the writings of Swedenborg, and gradually regaining his health, the supposition that his entire life, persecutions and all, had been led by a supernatural force, passes into certainty, the result of which is a more composed conception of life, and a tremendous literary activity.

It must not be supposed that these stages are sharply defined, that they mutually exclude one another. On the contrary, it should be clearly understood from the start, that the different views gradually fuse into one another, appear simultaneously, gain strength or subside in rhythm with health and environment. All we purpose to demonstrate is that the essential principles of the development are of the character outlined above.

Strindberg's morbidly emotional temperament has been emphatically dwelt on. The influence of environment, educa-

tion, and finally his experiences as young author, have also been sufficiently emphasized for our present purpose. It is the salient facts subsequent to these that remain to be presented.

If we are to depend on Strindberg's own account in "The Defense of a Fool,"—and it is in fact the only account we have a right to depend on in this respect,—his suspicions concerning his wife's moral conduct are well founded. "Orders to reserve the best pieces of meat for the dog" and a coming home in the morning with uncertain gait are likely to irritate any husband. And his fear of enemies is sound, although frequently some incidents receive an unduly exaggerated importance from his unruly fancy. Besides this unhappy state of affairs, the household was extremely ill-managed. He was by nature a most extraordinary worker; essays, learned treatises, novels and dramas, flowed from his pen with astonishing rapidity, but when he redoubled his energy in order to keep things above water the strain of his nerves began to tell: "I was exhausted by overwork and misery; I suffered much from headaches, nervous irritability, indigestion. . . . The doctor diagnosed catarrh of the stomach."⁸ These are his own words. Had there been no previous suspicions, the illness would naturally not have received any peculiar interpretation, but now, as it is, he apparently believes that the malady is caused by cyanide poisoning.⁹ This supposed criminal act was directly connected with his decision to go abroad, a decision which was most strenuously opposed by Marie.¹⁰ This must have taken place in the early part of 1883. The next time he speaks of "symptoms of persecutorial mania" is also in direct connection with physical weakness: "My illness became worse; I was so ill that I could take nothing but beef tea; I lay awake all night, suffering agonies, tortured by an unbearable thirst."¹¹

But Strindberg's greatest torture during these years was not the physical agonies of which he here speaks, but an obsessing idea that never left him at peace, and one to which he himself has attributed the greatest psychological importance in the bringing about of the final crisis,—the doubt of the legitimacy

⁸ *En dâres försvarstal*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXIV, p. 299.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 362.

¹⁰ Strindberg's wife.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

of his children. He was now an atheist; his primitive soul's most passionate desire for immortality was concentrated in the hope of living on in his children, even if his body should mingle with the chemical elements. When this last hope vanished, he found himself suspended in mid-air like a rootless plant. Never is he so truly, so intensely dramatic as in those passages of his tragedies where he pictures the death-agony of paternal hope. It is easy to understand that this state of mind must have played a part in the change of his conception with regard to religion. As yet it is but a symptom, but it is a symptom which in turn may become a cause.

In *Tschandala*, written in 1889 and said to be based on actual experiences while in Denmark, there are some very interesting revelations of subjective psychological importance. But in this short novel his imagination has indulged in such oriental orgies, his fancy proved itself so rank and gorgeous a blossom from the soil of experience that it is better not to make any scientific use of it for the present purpose. But in the novel "At the Edge of the Sea," written a year later, we find the following passage, the direct reference of which to the author's own experiences, there can be little doubt:

"There must be some secret in his life which all knew except himself. He soon saw in the preacher's actions a deliberate espionage, supported by some who wished to persecute him. He did not believe in it during his quieter moments, for he knew well enough that a persecutorial mania was the first symptom of that weakness which follows isolation. . . .

"But had not this morbid persecutorial mania, which comes from bodily weakness, its real cause, when he actually had been persecuted, worked against ever since the time when he had shown himself in school to be a power."¹²

From "At the Edge of the Sea" to "Inferno" there is a wide gap of six or seven years. What took place during this important period we can only conjecture. Available biographical data are either insufficient or unreliable for our purpose. Fortunately however, we have at our disposal a short essay ("Confused Sense-Impressions")¹³ which gives us an interesting glimpse into the author's physical and mental condition immediately before

¹² *I havsbandet, Sam. skr.*, v. XXIV, p. 223.

¹³ *Förvirrade sinnesintryck, Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, pp. 530-550.

the real crisis, and enables us to draw important conclusions. A brief résumé will at once reveal its importance.

He was in Paris, living alone in a large house, evidently most of the time engaged in scientific investigations and solitary meditations. He was depressed with melancholy. Superstitious notions linger in the background of his feelings without daring to appear boldly. Reclining on his bed, he experienced the same unpleasant sensation as he did when riding backwards in a wagon, a sensation which he tries to explain by the fact that he lies with his head turned towards the east so that he, "with the movement of the earth, turns sommersault backwards in space." He changed position, and felt at once extremely well.

When he, after half an hour of sleep, opened his eyes and gazed at the marble fire-place, he detected on it a net of blood-red threads. "It is," he explained, "the retina of my own eye that magnified is there projected,—a discovery, therefore, which no one should have made before me.

"Again I close my eyes for five minutes and when I open them, what do I see? On the fire-place is delineated a Begonia with white and red flowers, which tremble. I ask myself, why those trembling flowers? . . . In the same moment the vision disappears.

"What was it?

"Most likely the blood vessels of the cornea, with white and red corpuscles, looked at from a distance, enormously magnified.

"Should my eye be on the way to develop itself into a helioscope of tremendous power?"

He suffered from sleeplessness; but if disturbed sleep and excesses have thus sharpened his senses and nerves so effectively that he can see his own blood vessels as in a *laterna magica*, he thinks that he ought not to complain.

But the most interesting impression, probably, is a description of his difficulties when making a visit to the castle of Versailles, located at a not very great distance from his house. Between the two places there was a spacious semicircle, which Strindberg was forced to pass in order to reach the castle. But no sooner was he out on the open space than a mysterious fear seized him. The large building attracted him as large bodies attract small, but the open place terrified him as empty space.

He looked about for support and discovered a policeman whom he followed. First he had a feeling of well-being, ascribed "to the animal warmth that radiates from his body," but as soon as he became the object of the policeman's attention the feeling of well-being vanished. He was afraid of, he knew not what. Happily he chanced upon a lamp-post which he clung to like a ship-wrecked man to the plank. The spacious building continued to attract him, but he did not dare to let go of the post. In his "agony" he tried to solve his peculiar dilemma by metaphysical speculations. Here are two bodies, the castle and the iron lamp-post. Both exert their attraction on him. In order to be able to fight the blind brutal force, he personifies it. In vain. He almost feels his body divide itself, one half staying by the post, the other half promenading off to the castle, when finally he hits upon the happy idea of using a drifting cloud as an imaginary canoe and effecting a passage.

Going by an orangery, he claimed that he saw "the captive forces radiate over the arcades like Northern lights, natural enough to a very sensitive eye if we but consider that all energy is one." When he passed over the arcades, he discovered the ground gently rocking. The phenomenon, he believed, was caused by the surplus of power from the orangeries under ground, transmitted by his extremely sensitive nerves.

Standing by the castle wall, fearing all these invisible enemies, he suddenly imagined that he heard voices, laughs and cries from the city.

He ended these accounts by asking himself whether, after all, the sense-impressions may not have been purely subjective, or due to mental derangement. He was as nervous as a crab that has cast its shell.

After due allowance has been made for the artistic presentation of his experiences, the fact still remains that he has here invented the most ingenious scientific explanations, resorted to every possible and impossible hypothesis, in order to explain his pathological state; and it is clear that the least increase in the vividness, or persistency of his sense-delusion, would end in a falsified conception of their genesis. The time is evidently rapidly approaching when the most hair-drawn rationalistic interpretation would prove unsatisfactory. Clearly, enemies lurk on every side; he begins to detect plots and conspiracies

everywhere.¹⁴ But all is planned on such a tremendously large scale, every detail of which is so fiendishly conceived, and so superbly executed, that it would be ridiculous to ascribe it to "ordinary dense mortals"—in a word, extraorganic agencies are introduced.¹⁵

This course of events will appear even more natural to us if we but for a moment stop to consider that psychiatric symptoms are only exaggerations of familiar forces, latent or otherwise, present in the healthy mind. The introduction of the uncanny, supernatural forces in Strindberg's case is nothing more than by certain pressing conditions, forced revival of old acquaintances from his boyhood days. As a young lad he felt himself continually surrounded "by unknown threatening powers."¹⁶ In this, as in other respects, Strindberg is the child of nature whose powerful primitive fancy fills the universe with living creatures. The clouds take the shapes, not only of canoes by the aid of which a man, suffering from agoraphobia, may successfully cross the "semi-circular Place d'Armes,"¹⁷ but ships of hope by which he may embark for fancy's most precious islands; or they may become threatening dragons. It depends on whether or not his conscience at the moment is free or troubled. Elves dance on the silvery mists in the forest lanes, mermaids peer forth between white birch stems. But it may also be real imps with horns and claws that caper among the brandy bottles and wine goblets after a night of deep potations. It happens even that they turn offensive and attack their defenceless victim, pinch him unmercifully in both sides and back.

For there is no need to suppose that there was any maiden modesty observed in those circles of authors and scientists among whom Strindberg moved. Being a thorough Swede, he knew very little of the delicate law of the golden mean. And it can be assumed that nightly carousals played a very definite part in bringing about his unpleasant attacks. Nay more than that, there are positive proofs. His university career, we remember, was not very abstemious. During the first part of his married life his conduct in this respect seems to have been

¹⁴ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁶ See *Tjänstekvinnans son*, pp. 17, 46.

¹⁷ See above, p. 61.

exemplary, but when life at home became unbearable, he took, we are told, "a liberal recourse to absinthe."¹⁸ In another place, referring to the same habit, he writes that good spirits had taken it upon themselves to liberate him from a vice that leads to the insane asylums.¹⁹ After the separation from his first wife, he lived through a very stormy period at Berlin, during which his best friend was the passionate Polish author Stanisław Przybyszewski, who later under the name of "The Russian Popoffsky" was to play an important part in his most acute delusions of persecution. The very name of the wine tavern, "Zum Schwartzten Ferkel," where they usually spent their nights, symbolizes, as Gustaf Uddgren has already pointed out,²⁰ the character of this period. There is no doubt that both Bacchus and Venus received frequent sacrifices. And Strindberg, who has tried to keep those things secret no more than he has tried to conceal anything else of his life from our view, hinted at excesses as causes for his ailments; especially is this the case in "Legends." This may also partly account for his rapid recovery. I dare say that he has touched upon a very vital element of the mystic healing power of Swedenborg's teachings, when he points to the sentence: "Do not do this any more," referring no doubt to Swedenborg's denunciation of all excess.²¹

But the "imps" threw us mischievously, though profitably, a little out of our course. We were discussing Strindberg's early relation to the "powers." A few words more. It is true that those luxuriant growths of his imagination had been mercilessly pruned by English sceptics, but it requires no more than a short illness, and a conception of a world ruled by evil powers is at once formulated.²² His atheism, too, was not so deep-rooted as one might be led to believe from a hasty reading. His naturalistic philosophy was least of all the outcome of cold, merciless logic, of a closely-knit chain of reasoning, but more the result of immediate personal experiences. God has neglected to reveal himself to *Strindberg*. He had failed to fulfil his part

¹⁸ *En dâres försvarstal*, v. XXVI, p. 338.

¹⁹ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 71.

²⁰ *En ny bok om Strindberg*, p. 52.

²¹ *Legender*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 265.

²² *I röda rummet*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XIX, p. 88.

of the social contract and was therefore simply dethroned.²³ And in the beginning of "Inferno," he informs us that he, as the years passed, had become an atheist, because he noticed that the "Unknown Powers" had left the world to itself without showing any signs of life.²⁴ But now, when "immediate personal experience" warrants their presence, and at times a decidedly troublesome presence, they are again reinstalled, though it should be borne in mind, not without a great deal of strenuous opposition. Only by slow degrees he yielded.

But since we have once taken upon ourselves to lay bare the mediate and immediate causes most active in developing the August Strindberg we meet with in the "Inferno-books," there remain a few words to be said about the occult atmosphere he seems to have imbibed so freely while in Paris. Strindberg, wearied to the point of exhaustion of aesthetic productivity, and at the very height of his success, had resolved to devote himself exclusively to science. And he did devote himself for a time with all the fanatic-zeal and almost childish faith of which men of his passionate temperament alone are capable. Here he should finally obtain the indisputable truth he so long had sought in vain. "Now, when he entered the territory of the sciences," writes Gustaf Uddgren, "he felt himself on solid ground. He rejoiced with the raptures of a child because those subjects with which he should now busy himself were so obvious that doubts were impossible. He would no longer be the perpetual doubter, the perpetual destroyer of all existing conditions. Now the task of clearing away had been finished, and he considered the time ripe for beginning to build up anew."²⁵

No doubt he discovered truths. His scientific works have been sharply criticized, but the time will probably come when many of the so-called "Strindbergian side-shots" will be recognized as precious jewels of ingenious observation; and, indeed, some have been acknowledged as such already.²⁶ But the unconditional exactitude he had so earnestly sought, he did not discover. It was the flaws, the breaches, the mystic ele-

²³ *Författaren, Ibid.*, pp. 237-250.

²⁴ *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 9.

²⁵ Gustaf Uddgren, *En ny bok om Strindberg*, p. 50.

²⁶ See Christian Claussen's article in *For Kirke og Kultur*, v. 17, p. 548.

ments in the sciences that attracted and repelled, soothed and irritated him, with irresistible force.

It was in this state of disintegrating scientific faith, and at a moment of extreme nervous instability, which left him at the mercy of every wave of suggestion, that he was poisoned by one of the most disagreeable of religious epidemics: occultism, the very antithesis of a causal conception of things. The world is no longer the beautiful cosmos which inspires with veneration, but a despicable chaos of human whims and invalid spirits whose favorite servants seem to be weak-minded women. The strangest of all in Strindberg's life, it appears, is that after such a *saltomortale* of the reason, he could be saved for a new dramatic activity of frequently sublime results.

The development of the disease was very gradual. The period of time covered by "Inferno" alone extended from November 1894, the date of parting with his second wife, to June 1897, when the book was finished. The first part treats of his scientific experiments. He was busily occupied with the rather difficult task of extracting iodine from benzine, and of demonstrating that sulphur is not a simple element but a compound of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. The impelling motives in these and many of his former experiments were to overthrow the dominant conception in chemistry; to prove to the world that his theory of the unity of the world-stuff was correct; to convince his friends and enemies that he was not insane.

In order to make satisfactory progress, he isolated himself almost completely from the world, friends and all. He worked so intensely that in the evening utter depression generally was the result. He was without money—all his literary activity amounted exclusively to a few scientific essays. Consequently his meals were taken at irregular intervals, and the man who but lately had been greeted as the hero dramatist of the day, had not even a sou with which to pay his hotel bills.

No special gift of occult clairvoyance would have been needed to predict the disastrous effect of such a mode of living on a nervous instrument, long ere then strung to the highest pitch of sensitivity. The results were not slow to appear.

He now began to notice a number of small things which before had escaped his attention. "Three pianos in the adjoining rooms were performed on simultaneously." It was "prob-

ably an intrigue set on foot by the Scandinavian women artists," residing at the hotel, from whose company he had withdrawn. As soon as he went to sleep he was disturbed by their hammerings and noises. In the meanwhile his friends at the milk-shop where he took some of his meals, "began to change their attitude" towards him, "and an insidious enmity manifested itself by side-glances and mysterious words."²⁷

He was persecuted, no doubt. "Tired of fighting," he moved to Hotel Orfilia. This took place in February 1896. The hotel was an old, dreary looking, cloisterlike structure. "An atmosphere of mysticism hovers over the building." Evidently, it was the most unfortunate choice he could have made. But to make things worse, he was now seized by the frantic desire to make gold. The mere thought of this, with its innumerable magic-idea associations from a hundred alchemistic tales, was enough to inspire a poet with a spirit of enigmatical awe.

Characteristically enough, at first he felt at ease in his new abode, but not for long. Delusions were soon to appear more persistent and more fatal in their consequences than ever. He found letters with strange addresses put up in the corridor "in a challenging manner." He drew the conclusion that someone must be spying upon his gold synthesis. "But the devil himself has mixed the cards," so ingeniously was it all conceived.²⁸

One afternoon, when especially sad at heart, he heard someone play Schumann's "Aufschwung" from behind the foliage under his window. It is the "Russian Popoffsky," formerly his best friend, now his bitter enemy, who has come to kill him. Why? Because the Pole's present wife had been Strindberg's mistress. (Another proof that erotic ideas somehow are closely connected with delusions of persecutions.) It was he, therefore, who had disturbed him with the falsely addressed letters.

A whole month he was irritated by Schumann's "Aufschwung." True, the Polander's friends denied his presence, but there were other proofs. One day he found on the ground two dry twigs. They represented the forms of two Greek letters, p and y. He combined them. P—y meant Popoffsky. It was the powers who wished to warn him. One evening he

²⁷ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

saw in the heavens a hind. As he admired its perfect form and color, it made a sign with its head towards the southeast. A new warning of the presence of enemies. A third time, when in a still more excited state, it was a group of pansies that warned him.

Entirely in harmony with these revelations were his other experiences. A few characteristic examples will suffice. When out walking one day, he discovered an inscription on a wall. The thought came to him "like a flash of lightning" that the two intertwined letters F and S were the chemical sign for iron and sulphur. It was the secret of gold.²⁹ A series of experiments followed. Another time, he chanced upon "two oval pieces of paper, the one with the number 207 printed on it, the other with the number 28, which meant lead (atomic weight 207) and silicon (atomic weight 28)."³⁰ It resulted in a new series of alchemistic experiments.

We are told that he never was troubled by visions, but it frequently happened that real things appeared to him in human forms. Thus his pillow assumed grand sculpturesque shapes; and on the cupola of the Invalide dome, he succeeded in construing the silhouettes of—Napoleon and his marshals. In his chemical precipitates he detected faces and landscapes. Stones in the shape of hearts attracted him in particular.

His superstitious notions become so troublesome that he did not dare to enter the house of a friend because a child, sitting on the threshold, held a ten of spades in his hand. Old stories of witchcraft do not seem at all impossible to him any more, and he even goes so far as to try magical charms, himself.

Is *this* Strindberg, one is tempted to ask, the *same man* who but a few years before had written that pietism was what spiritualism now is: "a cheap edition, a pretended higher knowledge of concealed things, and it was therefore eagerly embraced by women and the uneducated."³¹ In one respect he is the same. Behold a man in whom there is no guile. It is not saying too much, that never before has the pathological character of spiritualism been so unmercifully, though unconsciously, revealed.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³¹ *Tjänstekvinnans son, Sam. skr.*, v. XVIII, p. 128.

All these scientific and personal superstitions are even more pronounced in "Legends" and the "Blue Books," but with an important difference. There the Powers are under the control of a Purposive Will. In this book, however, they are of special interest to the psychiatrist, because they appear in their genesis.

Most readers of "Inferno" will, in all likelihood, without further thought, look upon his superstitions as the product of his belief in the Powers; a view which, of course, may be cheaply obtained from his own words. And the conception is correct, if we but first admit a pathological cause for his occult spiritualism. This new faith and his superstitions are inseparably interwoven. Nevertheless, for the sake of clearness, they may profitably be treated apart. Or probably, it would even be more logical to believe that his superstitions, some of them at least, were the *direct* outgrowth of his delusions of self-reference, the children of his morbidly suspicious mood. He was now in an intensely agitated state of mind. "The expression of a face," the moving of a chair in the next room," "the sight of a clothes-line,"—all may seem to him factors of utmost importance, while all the thousand other incidents, which would entirely disapprove the foundation for his fears, are left entirely unnoticed. Would it not be natural to suppose, then, that his superstitions referred to are the outgrowth of the same soil of falsified ideation as his delusions? Let us but hastily compare the two, and perhaps the supposition will pass into certainty.

The Napoleonic silhouettes on the cupola of the Invalide dome, the sculpturesque Zeus head on his pillow, may be the wilful creation of a poetic fancy, but no man with unbiased power of judgment would interpret as a sign of murderous intention the fact that a musician is leisurely amusing himself with a composition of Schumann, nor would he attribute any supernatural importance to such a commonplace occurrence as a cloud changing its shape, except so far as it may be looked upon as a suggestive hint. All men are superstitious. Even the most ardent, up-to-date worshipper of "The New Realism" may feel unbecomingly irritated if his path is but crossed by the traditional black cat, and may silently have to call up whole hosts of beautiful "relations" in order to calm himself, but no university-bred man, ever so superstitiously inclined, would very likely read any higher intellectual meaning into the movements of a

group of pansies, caused by an afternoon breeze, and just as little would he interpret the initial letters inscribed on a wall some evening by a couple of romantic lovers as a special message from the Powers,—granting his belief in such creatures,—especially if he knew beforehand that those Powers were exceedingly wroth with his chemical experiments. It is his all-absorbing or abnormal desire to make gold that suffers him to read any mysterious meaning into the numbers on the pieces of paper flying about the street. It is his morbid fears that serve as a motor cue in the construction of a heavenly message from “a couple of dry twigs” which have accidentally dropped from a tree. Few things are more impossible than to escape entirely the influence of those tales administered to us during childhood days. Superstitious notions linger in every man’s heart, in August Strindberg’s by no means the least. He has, moreover, a natural inclination towards the mysterious, but it is his apperceptive illusions that enable them to run wild.

Only if we look upon Strindberg’s “Inferno”-revelations from the pathological point of view, will we succeed in finding full logical explanations of his religious and superstitious abnormalities. Even his most credulous beliefs in magic telepathy stand in the closest relation to his physical condition. He had for a long time, it seems, been suffering from what is called *precordial anxiety*. Since he could detect no visible cause for his strange disturbances, the thought struck him that it must all be due to telepathic waves of hate; and that he should feel himself capable of exerting a similar influence over others is but the necessary corollary. It is when reaching its maximum intensity that poisonous gases and electricity are first resorted to, and even then for a brief period. Swedenborg’s works are soon to supply him with a subtler machinery than “storage batteries.”

Besides the deceptions of sense caused by the precordial anxiety just referred to, hallucinations of hearing are the most prominent. Noises are frequently heard above his head, frequently also from the adjoining rooms, or a swishing sound in the ears disturbs him,³² but sometimes he hears “voices.”³³ His

³² *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, pp. 40, 94, 107, 178. *Legender*, *Ibid.*, pp. 218–220, 224 and others.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 114.

visual experiences are, as we have seen, illusions rather than hallucinations.

In July 1896 the lowest circle of his *Inferno* is reached. The most effective conception of his tortures may perhaps be given by citing a few paragraphs in his own words. He has moved away from Hotel Orfilia and there is again a moment of rest.

"The day after I had unveiled my incognito the peace is broken. One thing and another begin to happen, which disturb me, and the same feeling of disagreeableness as before depresses me anew. To begin with, in the room next to mine on the lower floor, which stands unoccupied and unfurnished, things are heaped, the use of which I am incapable of explaining. . . . At the same time the noise from Rue de la Grande begins over my head, hawsers are dragged about, they pound with hammers, just as if the construction of an infernal machine were going on according to the methods of the Nihilists.

"In the meantime the hostess, who at the beginning of my stay was extremely polite, becomes more reserved, spies upon me, and puts something derisive into her greetings. . . .

"The maid-servant, who tends to my room and serves my meals, has assumed a grave mien and casts furtive glances, full of compassion, at me.

"Now a wheel has been set up over my head which all day goes round, round. Condemned to death! That is the impression I have received, decidedly. By whom? The Russians? For what rôle? By the Pietists, Catholics, Jesuits, or Theosophists? As a sorcerer or as a black magician?

"Or perhaps by the police as an anarchist; an accusation often made use of in order to get at personal enemies."³⁴

A terrible night followed.

The preparations continued and assumed yet more dangerous forms. He detected infernal machines and accumulators on every side, and whole companies of conspirators arrive. His last night's experience at Rue de la Clef he described thus:

"I awake; the hall clock strikes two, a door is slammed and . . . I am out of bed, as if lifted by a pump that sucks my heart. I have hardly put my feet on the floor before an electric douche is poured over my neck and presses me to the ground. I raise myself again, snatch together my clothes and rush out

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95.

into the orchard, a victim of the most terrible palpitation of the heart.

"When I have gotten on my clothes, my first intelligent thought is to find the police inspector and have the house searched."

In his attempt to enter the house, he accidentally knocked over the night lamp in the kitchen, leaving himself in darkness.

"The terror brings me back to my senses, and I go back to my room guided by this thought: If I am mistaken, I am lost.

"I drag out an easy chair into the garden; and sitting under the starry heavens I reflect on what has occurred.

"A sickness? Impossible, because I felt splendidly until I unveiled my incognito. An attempt against my life? Yes, because the preparations were carried out before my eyes. Besides, I feel restored here in the garden, where I am out of my enemies' reach, and the functions of my heart are entirely normal. In the midst of these reflections, I hear someone cough in the room next to mine. Immediately a light cough answers from the room above. Most likely they are signals."³⁵

In order to find protection, he set out in the morning for Dieppe, where his Norwegian friends, the Thanlows, were living. They were terrified by his ghastly appearance: cheeks hollowed, hair streaked with gray, eyes haggardly staring, his linen dirty,—he himself was filled with horror at the sight of his condition. His friends gave him what he so sorely needed, sympathy; but their very kindness made him "feel out of place, like a condemned man in Paradise. I begin to detect that I am a bad being."

A room is assigned to him. In the evening he sees two men suspiciously point in the direction of his window, and the thought that he was persecuted by hostile electricians took possession of him anew.

"The night between the 25th and 26th of July, 1896, comes on. My friends have done what they can to calm me. Together we have examined all the garret rooms near to mine and even the attic, in order to assure me that no one conceals himself there for criminal purposes."

Fully dressed, he lay down on the bed to wait the fatal hour of two, but nothing happened. In a defiant spirit and in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 100.

order to challenge the Unseen and Unknown he got up, opened both windows and lit two candles. The electric current immediately began to work, slowly at first. He looked at the compass, which had been fixed as an indicator, but not a trace of electricity could be detected.

"But the tension increases, the beating of my heart becomes more violent. I offer resistance, but as by a burst of thunder my body is charged with a fluid that suffocates me and sucks out my heart.

"I rush downstairs into the drawing-room where a provisional bed had been arranged for me in case it should be needed. There I lay five minutes and collected my thoughts. Can it be radiating electricity? No, for the compass has denied it. An illness, which in turn has been called forth by fear of the two o'clock strike? No, because courage did not fail me, when I defied the attacks. Why should it then be necessary to light the candles in order to attract the unknown fluid that pesters me?

"Without finding an answer, lost in a labyrinth, I exert myself in order to sleep, but then the charge seizes me like a cyclone, it lifts me out of bed and,—the hunt is started. I conceal myself behind walls, I lay down by the door cases, in front of the stoves. Everywhere, everywhere, the furies find me. The soul-anguish prevails, the panic fear of everything and nothing overpowers me, so that I flee from room to room."³⁶

It was not before morning that rest was secured and sleep took pity on him.

Anyone reading passages like those cited above will at once become convinced that the Frenchman's celebrated "pathological 'Confessions' " are but calm, esthetic dreams compared with the midnight horrors of "Inferno," recorded to us, as the English critic Edmund Gosse puts it, "by a maniac who is positive Lucifer of the intellect."³⁷ Not once does he relax the vigilance over his own turbulent thoughts. It is not indulging in any youthful extravagance to claim that it is the keenest introspective and retrospective soul-analysis a neuropathic on the brink of hopeless insanity has ever written, a fact which ought

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103.

³⁷ Huneker's *Iconoclasts*, p. 141.

to render this record of the utmost importance to students of pathology.³⁸

The more delicate a person's temperament is, the more susceptible he is to impressions and the greater his capacity for conscious introspection, the more intense, undoubtedly, must also the torture of life become. One is almost forced to admit the truth of his assertion: "I am in hell, and condemnation hangs heavily over me,"³⁹ and to say that he is thoroughly justified when he exclaims with Jeremiah: "I have forgotten what happiness was."⁴⁰ "Why," he asks himself repeatedly, "must I thus suffer?" All the forgotten memories of youthful transgressions, of revengeful deeds, and Bohemian liberties again force themselves within the periphery of his consciousness. Did we say "forgotten"? No, Strindberg is one of those unhappy beings to whom the soothing gifts of forgetting was not granted. Memories of the past, drunk on the intoxicating fermentations of his fancy, hold however their grotesque witch-dances in his mind. And the number of this motley crew is ever increased by new and all too vivid experiences. He accuses himself of having trampled on the sacred laws of matrimony, and reproaches himself for the inconsistency of the views for which he has fought at different times. Now also he begins to think that his alchemistic researches into the unknown are displeasing to the Powers, who, like the gods of old, are envious of poor mortals; he has sinned through arrogance, *hybris*, the only sin the gods do not forgive, by imagining that he has solved the riddle of the Sphinx. But all his real or imaginary crimes did not seem to stand in any rational proportion to his tortures. Besides, had not his entire life been one long *via dolorosa*? He therefore concluded that the tortures to which he was subjected might partly have been caused by crimes committed in a pre-existent state.⁴¹

However this may be, the idea slowly takes possession of him that if he is thus doomed to suffer as no other man has suffered, crimes or no crimes, there must be some meaning behind it all. The nearest and most probable explanation is that

³⁸ A special translation of *Inferno* ought to be prepared especially for use in the psychological departments of our colleges and universities.

³⁹ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 133.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 137.

the Unknown Powers have taken upon themselves to purge him and correct him for the purpose of preparing him for some great and important mission in life,⁴² an idea which, for brief moments at least, became a source of infinite delight. With special pleasure he read passages from the old prophets, and from Job, which he interpreted as having been spoken and written for him exclusively.

But not even during the hours of his deepest despair was the vitality of his old scepticism entirely overcome. Strindberg was the born doubter, and he remained thus, however much we may hear about conversion and passive obedience to the mysterious voices about him and within him. He changed positions and views as the snake changes its skin, but though every semi-metamorphosis this characteristic follows him. He bowed before the storm, but only to rise, defiant as before, as soon as the severest attacks were over. And there were moments when his judgment of his own condition was unbiased and his vision clear. Not infrequently did he perceive that all his plans, constructed with utmost pain and ingenuity, were false; all sinister conspiracies and subtle plots, all hate-waves and electric fluids, were nothing but subjective creations of his own overwrought brain; that all the elaborate messages from the Unknown were coincidences of the most natural origin, and that the one thing necessary to restore his health would be medical attendance, rest, and quiet.

It was also during one of these lucid intervals that he decided to return to Sweden after a self-imposed exile of seven years, and there give himself over to the care of friendly hands.

IV

CONVALESCENCE

During the last days in July, 1896, we find Strindberg in Ystad, a somewhat antiquated little town, situated by the sea side in the south of Sweden. Here he entrusted himself to the care of his personal friend, Dr. A. Eliasson, who frankly spoke to him concerning his mental condition, and began at once to give him systematic treatment. This medical treatment, together with the invigorating sea breeze, the meeting with

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 137, 164, 165.

understanding friends, and, by no means the least, the discontinuation of his chemical experiments,¹ had an almost instantaneous effect. He had, it is true, one or two attacks, characterized by the same fitful intensity as those already referred to.² Nevertheless, it is from this moment that we must begin to look for his recovery. Hardly more than about two weeks after his arrival, we are informed that his health was regained; that he slept by night and worked by day; and that the displeasure of Providence, as is quite natural, seemed to have postponed any further manifestations.³

He rejoiced somewhat too prematurely; past experiences had left their imprints too deeply in flesh and soul to permit so unconditional and complete a recovery. *Inferno* was not yet ended, though there might be a considerable abatement in the white-hot intensity of its flames. After only a month's stay at Ystad, he departed for Austria, having accepted an invitation to his mother-in-law's home on the Danube. The whole community seems to have been a veritable abode of crippled thoughts, superstitions, squalor and degenerate religions, emotions of every imaginable hue, saturation and tone quality. The whole atmosphere is a prism by which every intellectual ray of light, seeking to penetrate, is broken up into fancy-colored mystic conceptions.

Strindberg had no sooner put his foot into this community than his hypersensitive soul, ever open to new impressions, like a huge phonograph receiver of most delicate sensitivity, gathered up, as it were, the manifold ripples of religious thoughts and emotions, and thereupon objectified them before our eyes into a picture on which we are forced to gaze with a strange mingling of admiration, pity and disdain. The influence of such an environment could certainly not prove to be the very best. Some of his old troubles were almost instantaneously renewed, others of a more specifically theosophic and magic nature were added. Probably the most pathetic chapter in this remarkable documentary record of a mind struggling to maintain its equilibrium, is the one which pictures the August Strindberg

¹ As far as it has been possible for me to learn, no persistent chemical experimenting was carried on after this time.

² See above, pp. 80-85.

³ *Inferno, Ibid.*, p. 103.

who once brandished his sword for the new thoughts with the boldness and power of an old war-god, now sitting at his writing table, and in strict obedience to the advice given to him by initiated occultists, busily warding off the attacks of his imaginary spiritual foes by thrusts of a Dalmatian dagger, in order that he may be able to finish a treatise in chemistry,⁴ contrary to their wishes. Deeper than this an intellectual iconoclast never fell; but it is his glory that he fell fighting. Not an inch of ground was lost which he did not bitterly contest.

Yet we must not suppose that his visit had disastrous results only; rather the contrary is true. Here he found what for years he had vainly sought, genuine motherly sympathy. His mother-in-law and her sister, in whose houses he intermittently stayed, were pitifully superstitious, but animated, nevertheless, by an earnest desire to understand and forgive. It was here, too, that his fiery emotional temperament was caressed into meekness by the touch of little chubby hands, and his feverish thoughts turned into harmony by the ring of healthy laughter and looks from the innocent, sparkling eyes of his two year old daughter, who was being brought up by his mother-in-law. His wife he was not allowed to see, a condition to which he submitted without a murmur.

But the most important factor among these gentler forces working for his recovery remains yet to be touched upon. It was here that, through the agency of his relatives, he became more thoroughly acquainted with his countryman, Emanuel Swedenborg. As Strindberg had much in common with this remarkable man, it is not at all strange that he should feel attracted by him. Both were possessed by an all-embracing interest in life's phenomena and everything connected therewith; both were moved by the same questioning, probing spirit that knew no rest, and by the same impetuous imagination that suffered itself to be guided by no reins,—and below all this there is in both a substratum of that Teutonic ethical sternness of which the Romanic peoples seldom have a conception. At the age of 56 Swedenborg passed through a remarkable psycho-religious crisis, out of which he emerged, according to some authorities, a madman, but according to others, a spiritual seer of hitherto unsurpassed penetrative insight. It was as a

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 153.

middle-aged man, likewise, that August Strindberg performed his Inferno-journey from which he returned, perchance neither saner nor wiser than before, yet with a fund of experiences which, given esthetic expression, in many respects made his second literary activity surpass his first.

Swedenborg's bodily affections during his crisis were neither so obviously pathological, nor so varied as those of Strindberg. Afterwards, when culminating in visions, they took a matter-of-fact form different from anything else in the world that we have on record. Still there is enough similarity in the two cases to offer an interesting comparison. Read, for example, the following description of the Seer's first vision:

"At ten o'clock I went to bed, and was somewhat better; a half hour later I heard a noise under my head, I thought that then the tempter flew away; immediately a quaking came over me, so violent from my head and my whole body, but with some rumbling, and that several times, I found that something holy enveloped me, at which I went to sleep, and about twelve, one or two o'clock at night such a violent quaking came over me from head to foot, with a rumbling as if many winds rushed together, which shook me, which was indescribable, and prostrated me upon my face. Then while I was prostrated, in that moment I was wide awake and saw that I was thrown down, and wondered what it meant. And I spoke as if I were awake, but yet found that the words were put into my mouth and (said) 'O Almighty Jesus Christ, that thou dost condescend to come to such a great sinner, make me worthy of that grace'; I clasped my hands together and prayed, and then a hand came forth, which pressed my hands tightly."⁵

Or, read a corresponding account in the same book:

"Something very wonderful happened to me; violent quakings came over me, such as when Christ gave me the divine grace, one after the other, ten or fifteen times; I expected to be thrown upon my face as on the former occasion, but this did not happen. At the last quaking I was lifted up, and I touched with my hands a back, felt over the whole back as well as underneath on the breast; straightway it lay down, and I also saw before me a face, but it was quite obscure; I stood on my knees; I wondered whether I should lie down beside it; but I

⁵ Swedenborg's *Drömmar*, p. 11.

did not do so, just as if it were not permissible: all quakings went from my body below up to my head: this was in a vision when I was neither waking nor sleeping, for my thoughts were all collected; it was the internal man separated from the external, which sensed it; when I was wholly awake, such quakings came over me several times. It must have been a holy angel, since I was not thrown down upon my face."⁶

Who is so biased by preconceived conceptions or religious zeal that he can not detect the close pathological connection between the experiences as here set forth by Swedenborg and those cited in the previous chapter? The time at which the attacks came over him, the noises, the violent quakings, prostrations and upliftings,—all stand in the closest possible relationship to Strindberg's nightly experiences.⁷ It is also interesting to notice the feelings of elation that now and then were common to both of them. Compare, for example, these statements in the "Dreams." "Otherwise I was awake as in a heavenly ecstasy, which is indescribable." . . . "Had also in mind and body a feeling of indescribable joy, that, had it existed in a higher degree, the body would have dissolved from pure joy,"⁸ with the following in *Inferno*: "The first result was a tremendous expansion of my mind; a psychic feeling of energy, which demanded to be revealed. I thought I had unlimited powers, and pride inspired me with the foolish thought of trying to perform wonders."⁹ . . . "In the morning my mind can rejoice over an equilibrium and an expansion which comes close to ecstasy; I do not walk, I fly; I do not feel that I have a body, all sadness volatilizes, and I am altogether soul."¹⁰

This close relationship Strindberg was not slow to perceive. That at first he made a totally different interpretation of his experiences, depended of course on the difference in direction and momentum of their expectations, conditioned by the content of their consciousness previous to these experiences. But now when his violently agitated emotions had been somewhat calmed, leaving room for reflection, the Seer's explana-

⁶ Swedenborg's *Drömmar*, p. 45.

⁷ Cf. above pp. 77-83.

⁸ Swedenborg's *Drömmar*, p. 10.

⁹ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

tions easily gained ground, since they seemed to Strindberg to be subtler and apparently offering fewer logical difficulties. He had been too completely a slave under the "Ape-King," too sadly blindfolded by the gross materialistic falsity of "The Horse-Doctor Theory" to perceive the real nature of his experiences, but now his eyes had finally been opened. He had been afflicted neither by "black magicians" nor "experienced electricians," neither by "Jesuits" nor "Occultists," but by chastising spirits sent by God himself with the specific purpose of cleansing him and preparing him for a higher sphere of existence. If, perchance, human beings had plotted against him, they had only been instruments of a higher will and therefore in reality blameless. In other words, he had passed through what Swedenborg terms "Vastation."¹¹

We have every reason to doubt Swedenborg's normality when we learn from him that melancholy is caused by spirits not yet in conjunction with hell, being still in their first state. "Such spirits love," we are informed, "things undigested and foul, such as pertain to food becoming foul in the stomach; consequently they are present with men in such things because they find delight in them, and they talk there with one another from their own evil affection. The affection that it in their speech flows in from this source into man, and when this affection is the opposite of man's affection it becomes in him sadness and melancholy anxiety; but when it agrees with him it becomes in him gladness and cheerfulness. These spirits appear near to the stomach, some to the left and some to the right, and some beneath and some above, also nearer and more remote, thus variously in accordance with their affections. That this is the source of anxiety has been proven to me by much experience."¹² We may feel greatly amused when told that toothache is caused by the spirit of St. Paul lurking in the corresponding cavities of hell. But in whatever manner we are personally inclined to interpret the cause of such and similar statements, we must nevertheless agree that "if he must needs be mad, there is a rare method in his madness; and if the world insists on his being a visionary it must admit that his visions are something anoma-

¹¹ *Arcana Coelestia*, V. I, n. 1106-1113; *Inferno*, *Sam skr.*, v. XXVIII, p. 184; *En blå bok*, *Sam skr.*, v. XLVI, p. 33.

¹² *Heaven and Hell*, n. 299.

lous, in their systematic and mathematical form."¹³ And it is just this rare and mathematical order that August Strindberg now above everything else needed. A man of his turn of mind must absolutely have some unifying principle by which to hold together the manifold experiences of life. It matters not essentially, as far as its psychological working is concerned, whether this principle is a sectarian creed or a naturalistic philosophy; whether it is the systematized illusions of a visionary or a cosmic truth, but a unifying principle he must have if he is to live and to act.¹⁴ But let us be on our guard lest we should imagine that Strindberg was more indebted to Swedenborg than he really is. It would be an unpardonable mistake and a great injustice to hold that he received and swallowed Swedenborg's theology bodily. He interpreted his master rather liberally and in a way which most likely would not have met with Swedenborg's personal approval, had he lived. In several places he gives us to understand that by him Swedenborg's conception of hell was conceived as referring solely to the life in this world, and it will seem, at times at least, he considered his chastising spirits as the self-created creatures of a troubled conscience.¹⁵ It is likely that in the ear of a devout Swedenborgian the following summary would produce a twinge of sacrilegious dissonance: "Be ye comforted therefore, and rejoice over the grace which has been granted unto you, all ye who are troubled and plagued with sleeplessness, nightmares, visions, anxiety, and palpitation of the heart! Numen adest! God will have you!"¹⁶

On May 3, 1897, he had recovered sufficiently to begin the composition of "Inferno." On June 25 of the same year, it was already finished, and for the first time his innermost experiences during the years of his literary silence, and his views resulting therefrom, were made known to the world. A distinct shock was produced. His old friends mourned because their hero had fallen. His enemies rejoiced that the wit which had given them so many smarting slashes had lastly turned its

¹³ Tenneman's *Manual of the History of Philosophy*.

¹⁴ In tracing the influence of Swedenborg, the passage in the third chapter on page 65 with regard to Strindberg's excesses should be recalled.

¹⁵ *Inferno*, *Sam. skr.*, v. XXVIII, pp. 95, 132, 133.

En blå bok, *Sam. skr.*, v. XLVI, pp. 60, 76.

¹⁶ *Inferno*, p. 189.

deadly edge against its own life, and that the proud intellect, which had caused them worries and sleepless nights, now lay wounded and bleeding on the ground, never henceforth likely to trouble their peace. But not so, they were all led astray. It is out of "Inferno's" chaotic absurdities that his artistic Phoenix rises from its ashes, cleaving the azure blue on mighty pinions.

How was it done? A glance at a description of the manner in which he composed most of his works will, perhaps, help to solve the riddle:

"Just as I have pen and paper ready, it breaks loose. The words actually rush down upon me, and my pen works under high pressure to set everything down on paper. When I have written for a while, I feel that I am floating about in space. Then it is as if a higher will than my own causes the pen to glide over the paper and writes down words, which seem to me to be pure inspirations."¹⁷

It is the psychic residua of former life experiences which unconsciously crystallize themselves into dramatic personages and dialogues. It is the psychic law of experience itself that gives esthetic form and unity to his productions. Only occasionally does any conscious logical ideation take place. Now and then his desire for metaphysical explanation becomes the determining factor in his creations and mostly with disastrous results. We may read the anti-scientific portions of his "Blue Books" until all our conscious feelings of a causal cosmic order become wearied and sick, but with most of his artistic productions it is different. Even when introduced to the most mystic, "To Damascus" and "The Dream Play," one gets a distinct impression that behind the capricious dream-fancies operates the merciless logic of life. In a word, it is the voice of the soul-stratum itself, as is the case with every truly inspired writer, that rises up and composes independently, as it were, of his philosophic superman. Perhaps this is what he himself felt when he said: "I am inclined to believe that we are most learned in those beautiful moments, when we are unconscious of ourselves."¹⁸

Like the spider, he wove art's golden web from his own entrails. While reading his best stories we are held captive as in a

¹⁷ Gustaf Uddgren: *En ny bok om Strindberg*, p. 136.

¹⁸ *Påkyrkogården, Sam. skr.*, v. XXVII, p. 600.

magic grasp; the voice that tells them vibrates over the tremendous resonance-chambers of his individual experiences, and they are many, for he lived a thousand lives. His words stir the blood and the heart; they burn themselves into our memory; he plays upon every harp string of our emotions, knows how to strike every chord from the harshest dissonances of diabolical hatred to the sweetest harmonies of maiden love.

Even during the hours of his deepest deprivation, he carried within himself something of that indestructible spark, which makes a man's life sublime and his works eternal. There seethes and pulsates even in the depressive atmosphere of the Inferno something of that irrepressible militancy of the human soul, which equally demands veneration whether seated on a throne or prostrated in the dust. Psychiatric interest and profane criticism, alike, should step reverently aside and bow their heads before a man who with all the knowledge at his command strove to control his soul's very death-cry.¹⁹ And because of his dark hours we should never forget that there also followed days when the clouds rolled away, and he could exaltingly exclaim: "Now, it is high heaven, the wind is genial, feel its caresses! This is life; yes, now I live, just now! and I feel my ego swell, expand, rarify, become illimitable; I am everywhere, in the sea which is my blood, in the mountains which are my skeleton, in the trees, in the flowers; and my head reaches up into heaven, I look out over the universe that is I, and I feel all the power of the creator within me, for it is I. I would like to take the whole mass in my hands and remold it into something more perfect, more permanent, more beautiful . . . would like to see the whole creation and all created beings happy; born without pain, living without sorrow, and dying in quiet happiness! Eva! will you die with me now, at this instant, for in the next moment pain will envelop us?"²⁰ This may be the state of mind which, in the language of the psychiatrist, is called elation, it may be the wine of ecstasy that makes the intellect swim wildered, but it is this mental condition as well that, at times, made his words ring out with the earnestness and power of a prophet.

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¹⁹ See pages 84-85.

²⁰ *Till Damaskus, Sam. skr. v. XXIX, p. 54.*